GETTING EFFECTIVE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE PRACTICES TO SCALE: B.E.S.T. PRACTICES STAFF DEVELOPMENT

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SOME SCHOOL DISCIPLINE PRACTICES PROMOTE ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR

Many school practices contribute to the development of antisocial behavior and the potential for violence. Because of the overemphasis on individual child characteristics, these important variables are often overlooked. These include, among others:

1. Ineffective instruction that results in academic failure;
2. Inconsistent and punitive school-wide, classroom and individual behavior management practices;
3. Lack of opportunity to learn and practice prosocial interpersonal and self-management skills;
4. Unclear rules and expectations regarding appropriate behavior;
5. Failure to correct rule violations and reward adherence to them;
6. Failure to individualize instruction to adapt to individual differences; and,
7. Failure to assist students from at-risk backgrounds to bond with the schooling process. (Sprague, Walker, Golly, et al., in press)

These factors are *all* amenable to change in a positive, proactive manner (Mayer, 1995; Sugai & Horner, 1994; Walker et al., 1996). Unfortunately, school personnel have a long history of applying simple and unproven solutions to complex behavior problems (e.g., office discipline referrals, suspensions). They express understandable disappointment when these attempts do not work as expected (See Walker et al., 1996). This practice is sustained by a tendency to try to remove the problem student via suspension or expulsion, rather than focus on the administrative, teaching and management practices that either contribute to, or reduce them (Tobin, Sugai, & Martin, 2000).

HOW DO WE SOLVE THIS PROBLEM?

Educators in today's schools and classrooms must be supported to adopt and sustain effective, cost-efficient practices (Sugai and Horner, 1994; Walker et al., 1996). Effective approaches to positive school-wide discipline and management, for example, include (a) systematic social skills instruction; (b) academic and curricular restructuring; (c) positive, behaviorally based interventions; (d) early screening and identification of antisocial behavior patterns; and (e) preventive school-wide discipline (Sprague, Sugai, & Walker, 1998; Sugai & Horner, 1994; Walker et al., 1996). This brief will describe an approach to supporting improvement in school-wide and classroom discipline.

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Staff Development for School and Classroom Discipline. In our work, we provide training and support to representative teams of teachers in schools over a 2- to 3-year period, providing training and technical assistance to install each of the above components. These school teams work to complete initial and ongoing needs assessment, choose interventions (e.g., school rules, social skills curriculum), and use student- and staff-level data to refine and evaluate their efforts (see Todd et al., 1999; Sprague et al., in press for a description of this work). The remainder of this article outlines the specifics of the training and technical assistance approach.

PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR BEST: BUILDING EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS TOGETHER

- **What does BEST provide?**
  BEST (Sprague et al., 1999) provides a standardized training program aimed at improving school and classroom discipline in schools. It is based on the Effective Behavioral Support (EBS) (Sugai and Horner, 1994, Sprague, Sugai and Walker, 1998) model developed at the University of Oregon. Program components address school-wide, non-classroom, classroom and individual student interventions and the program includes content related to school-wide discipline, classroom management, and individual student supports. The program aims to train representative school team members to develop and implement school rules, rule teaching, positive reinforcement systems, databased decision making at the school level, effective classroom management, curriculum adaptation, and an introduction to functional behavioral assessment and positive behavioral intervention.

- **Is the program effective?**
  This program is based on many years of research on effective school discipline practices. Building Effective Schools Together and similar models have been replicated by other researchers using similar approaches. The effects of the intervention are documented in a series of studies implemented by researchers at the University of Oregon (Sprague, Walker, Golly, et al., in press; www.pbis.org). Studies have shown reductions in office discipline referrals of up to 50%, with continued improvement over a three year period in schools that sustain the intervention. In addition, school staff report greater satisfaction with their work, compared to schools that did not implement B.E.S.T. Comparison schools show increases or no change in office referrals, along with general frustration with the school discipline. Studies are underway now to relate the quality of implementation to changes in student and staff behavior, as well as documenting changes in student attitudes and self-reported problem behavior.

- **How does B.E.S.T. address critical elements for implementation?**
  The staff development materials are included in a training notebook (one for trainers and another for participants). These materials were developed and field-tested (social validity data are available) in Mississippi and Oregon. Replications are underway in several Oregon School Districts, all eleven RCC regions in California and in Arkansas and Nebraska.

- **How much time is involved?**
  Training sessions are designed to last approximately 1 to 1.5 hours each. There currently are 15 segments designed to be delivered sequentially (Total time for training approximately 18-25 hours). Each segment can be delivered alone or as a daylong of multi-day training event. In the staff development manual, times for each training segment are specified.

  While participating in training, and after completion of the basic material, we recommend that school discipline teams (building administrator, representative teachers, other stakeholders) meet approximately once per month to review training content as needed and to set up a regular process of reviewing and refining the school discipline plan (initial goals are developed during training) and other, school site-based activities. A format for these meetings is specified and each meeting should last between 20-60 minutes.

  In the first year of implementation, the staff development and team meeting activities would require 20-30 hours. We also suggest that the entire building staff receive informational updates and an initial presentation on the components of the model, expected benefits, and staff responsibilities.

- **How much does it cost to implement BEST?**
  Costs include staff trainer time, curriculum purchase (available from the University of Oregon IVDB) and other costs related to implementing a quality school-wide discipline plan (e.g., student incentives, food, and beverages for meetings, travel to visit model sites etc.). Actual costs will vary, depending on how the activities are funded and personnel resources already available in the district or school.

- **Is the training appropriate for typical school personnel?**
  Training is designed to be delivered in three, one-day sessions or can be delivered in 15-20 separate, distributed training sessions. Our experience is that longer sessions (1/2 or full day) sessions are most productive for school teams. In addition to team training, regular meetings need to be held on the school site to track progress and solve implementation problems. Checklists to outline the tasks and activities for the team are specified during the training events.

  Coaching assistance is available from IVDB staff and by discipline team members who are responsible to support and inform their colleagues in the school. IVDB staff will offer telephone, internet, and on-site technical assistance. We recommend 2-5 days of follow-up technical assistance after the initial training is completed. In addition, our research indicates that additional improvement will be documented if each school team carries out the intervention for at least three years. As such, a maintenance dose of training and technical assistance will be required past the initial year.

  The school team is to be representative of each major stakeholder group. Once implementation goals are set, all stakeholders should receive training and information. Dates and format for school-wide training need to be planned during normal staff release days or funding will need to be provided to support these activities. A recommended option is to appoint a school-based facilitator who can oversee scheduling of meetings and general functioning and tasks of the school team. We also recommend appointing a coordinator at the school district level who supports the building level coaches.

We also are willing to train district level or building level personnel to deliver the training content after each component is modeled by IVDB staff. At this point, we aim to train local personnel to assume the trainer and coach roles and responsibilities. "Training of trainers" is provided, using clearly delineated instructions. We train district level or building level personnel to deliver the training content after each component is modeled by IVDB staff.

- **Does the training use good adult learning techniques?**
  The training materials are based on the recommendations of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) guidelines and include lectures, discussions, reflection, work tasks germane to the intervention, jigsaws, etc. The training is designed to be active and school teams work on tasks that will be immediately usable in their school.

- **How do I know if it is working?**

  Participating schools are asked to develop and present an annual plan with measurable goals and objectives. The goal setting session is conducted early in the process and is refined over the course of the remaining days of training or during in-building meetings.

  We have a full evaluation model developed and an essential feature of the intervention is the use of data based feedback on essential outcomes to staff. Student measures include knowledge change on social skills teaching, discipline referral patterns, achievement test scores, attendance, etc. We also have used staff and student surveys to measure progress. The evaluation model maps directly onto the content and process of the model. A sample evaluation packet is available from the author.

- **How does this fit in the big picture of school improvement?**
  The school team must represent all school stakeholders. We also recommend that the school include improvement of discipline and safety as a top priority for school improvement and that at least 85% of staff formally indicate commitment to the training and implementation process.

  Administrative leadership is emphasized throughout the process. The building administrator is required to be part of the school discipline team and participate in all planning and staff development activities.

  We suggest that funding for staff release or stipends for participation are provided for building discipline team members. In building facilitators/coaches should receive a stipend for the additional work they perform.

- **What about help when things don't work?**
  Trouble shooting and/or intervention are immediately available in response to low performance.

- **What personnel and funding are available to provide technical assistance to support interested schools in implementing the practice?**

    UO/IVDB staff is available to provide staff development, evaluation, and implementation technical assistance for a fee or we will collaborate with state or local districts to obtain grant funding for staff development and evaluation activities. We have collaborated with districts to apply for, and use, CSPD funds, Safe and Drug Free Schools prevention funds, and federal research and demonstration grants awarded to the IVDB.

- **Where is additional information available?**

    The training manuals are available from the University of Oregon Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior, 1265 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403 or by calling 541-346-3592 (contact is Wendy Weller). Manuals are to be purchased for each participant or participating districts (or regions) may copy the manual for copyright fee, payable to the Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior. It is required that individuals who intend to deliver staff development receive training from the developers before using the materials.

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